

WorkFirst High Performance Bonus Innovative Project 2002 Nomination Form

Name of project: **Family Services Outreach**

Local Planning Area: Bellingham/Whatcom County

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Project period (only projects operating between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002 will be considered): **May 14 – 22, 2002**

1.	<p>Describe your project.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Knowing what’s out there is the key” Bellingham Herald May 20, 2002</i></p> <p>The Whatcom County WorkFirst Local Planning Area (LPA) team and The Opportunity Council, the local community action agency, recognized that people in the rural areas are the least likely to take advantage of educational and other post-employment options offered in Bellingham. These are services that could help employed people move off TANF, or prevent their entry or return to TANF in the event of a change in life situation. Therefore, the LPA and Opportunity Council designed a countywide outreach program called Family Services Outreach (FSO) to meet the needs of families in outlying communities. FSO aimed to market post-employment, post-TANF, and “TANF preventative” services to the rural communities in our area and to use the opportunity to gather information about how to best serve families in these communities.</p> <p><i>He had just lost his job. He was depressed and disillusioned. He didn’t have anyone to talk to and he didn’t know where or how to start looking for another job. He regained some optimism, direction, and hope with the information about internet job search resources, free workshops, and help with resume preparation.</i></p> <p>Family Services Outreach was created to disseminate information to affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Caseload Reduction – being able to access childcare, food stamps, medical assistance, family planning, and child support might provide enough support to keep a family from filing for TANF cash assistance. ◆ Employment Retention – assistance with childcare or child support might help a person remain employed. ◆ TANF Returns – many people do not realize they can continue to receive food stamps, medical and/or childcare assistance even though they are working. ◆ Child Support – people do not know that there is an agency that will help them collect child support even if they are not on TANF and regardless of income. ◆ Family Violence—information available in a non-governmental, community-based environment makes it possible for a family or individual to get information and help they need more easily and safely. <p>Participants were not identified as TANF or not TANF, but our target population was low income working families and current TANF recipients. There were approximately 110 adults who attended the fairs. Resource staff from the schools/other agencies also attended the events to gather material for their customers.</p> <p>Family Services Outreach cost \$4400.00 for the five events. This cost includes printing, publicity, marketing, and news releases. The events were held with no additional staff costs. The budget also included design costs for a logo that will be used for future events.</p> <p>The Whatcom County LPA and The Opportunity Council firmly believed that Family Services Outreach would meet three of the four purposes of TANF:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide assistance to needy families so children may be cared for in their own homes or the homes of relatives – Through information on Child Care Resource and Referral and WCCC, and WtW housing. 2. End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work – Through provision of information on Employment Resources, Educational Options, Child Support, and legal services. 3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies – Through information from Planned Parenthood and medical programs.
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2.	What makes this project innovative?
	<p><u>We Took It To Them:</u> Family Services Outreach was the result of the LPA thinking of ways to address the needs of working families and how to help keep them employed, especially those in the outlying communities who we knew were not accessing the post-employment resources available. The Opportunity Council offered to co-sponsor a series of “information and services fairs” throughout the county, targeting rural communities. We wanted to reach out and take the information and services to where it was convenient for the people. Originally we thought the post-employment/TANF services would be most requested. But the “TANF preventative” services were equally sought.</p> <p><i>The two teenagers hesitated at the door, but entered when they were greeted warmly and invited in. They quickly scanned the room and then headed to the Family Planning representative. Many questions were answered and the girls got the information they needed in a non-threatening, non-biased setting.</i></p> <p><u>We Made It Comfortable and Easy:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The events were planned through the public schools primarily (most often coordinating with the Readiness to Learn programs). ◆ The “fairs” were in buildings in the communities that the residents were familiar with and places that would be the best place for people to congregate. ◆ Selected agencies/organizations were invited to be present at the events, and written information was solicited from many more. ◆ On-site services included vision screening, Headstart applications, subsidized housing applications, eligibility forms for medical, food stamps, etc. ◆ Information was organized into subject tables rather than agencies/organizations. This would be easier for the families to choose what to visit. ◆ The events were held 3PM to 6PM --immediately after school and before people arrived home to settle in. ◆ There were on-site childrens’ activities and refreshments. ◆ We advertised through schools, flyers/posters in local businesses, newspaper and radio announcements. ◆ WPLEX mailing services was utilized to mail information to current and post TANF recipients. <p><u>This event was a learning experience.</u> The attendance was lower than expected. However, this was the first time an event like this has been offered in these communities. We got excellent feedback from the school staff and other community members. For future events, we learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The event should be connected with some other established function like a school open house. ◆ The frequency and distribution of events should be spread out, not all within two weeks. ◆ There should be some “hook” such as a gift certificate or prize that will entice people to come to the event. ◆ People really like give-aways (pencils, notepads, pens, etc) and will visit a table to secure them. ◆ On-site childrens’ activities allowed the parents the time to ask questions, get material, and fill out forms. This was valuable and important to continue. ◆ We need to keep more statistical information at future events (how many applications were completed, what kinds of applications were most requested, etc.) ◆ The FSO was an effective marketing tool for the partnership. Press coverage was positive and thorough. <p><i>She had been struggling to meet expenses as a single parent. The children’s father was not paying child support and she did not know what to do since she could not afford an attorney. She got information about the Division of Child Support and subsequently met with the representative who comes to Whatcom County. As a result of that contact, she now receives regular child support and is in school training for a higher paying job.</i></p> <p><u>We Made Better Local Connections:</u> This project enhanced referral processes by involving many agencies and programs. Everyone involved got more information about services and how to access them and networked with new people. WorkFirst program staff become more knowledgeable and better able to help their clients with direct referrals or information about previously untapped services.</p> <p>Originally, we thought the number of attendees would demonstrate the success of the project. But we realized this was just an indicator of how many responded to our publicity. We wanted to make a difference in a family’s well being. This is not something we can measure unless we can track that family over time. So, we looked at what happened with individuals during the events.</p>

	<p><i>She and her two boys fled to her sister's home to escape an abusive partner. She did not know the area, it was 20 miles into town, and she did not want to travel far from her new sanctuary. But she needed help and did not know where to go. She made contacts and learned of services at the FSO.</i></p> <p>The success of the connections that were made is still being demonstrated. Just last week, we received three requests for information or referrals from service providers who attended the events, who called based on the information they had received there.</p>
3.	<p>Partnerships</p> <p>Family Services Outreach is an example of how to <u>begin</u> a community effort to address a need. This first year laid the groundwork for a means to get services out to the people who need them. Many previous and new partners were involved. The partners, in part, included: Bellingham CSO, The Opportunity Council, Employment Security Department, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, NW Indian College, Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, Interfaith Coalition, WorkSource, Planned Parenthood, SeaMar Healthcare, ADASA (drug and alcohol counseling), DVR (vocational rehabilitation), Headstart, YMCA Childcare, Best Self summer program, Self-Help Homes, Kulshan Land Trust, Bellingham-Whatcom County Housing Authority, Inter-community Housing, Habitat for Humanity, Salvation Army, YWCA, Whatcom County Health Department, Lake Whatcom Residential Treatment Center, Whatcom County Psychiatric Center, St Joseph Recovery Center, Catholic Community Services, Whatcom Literacy Council, Goodwill Industries, Northwest Justice Project, Law Advocates, Street Advocates, Superior Court Facilitation, Landlord Tenant, Food Banks, Brigid Collins Services, DCFS (children services), Whatcom Crisis Services, DCS (child support), Northwest Youth Services, and several temporary Employment agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Opportunity Council co-sponsored this event and lent their expertise and connections in marketing and publicity of the Family Services Outreach. Their active participation and input into the design and implementation of the project was invaluable. ◆ Whatcom Community College and The Opportunity Council took the lead in organizing the events in the different communities by contacting the Readiness-to-Learn coordinators and schools. ◆ The Readiness-to-Learn coordinator in each community was FSO's contact, and events were often held in the schools. ◆ The area schools helped to publicize the events through their newsletters and helped us plan how to most effectively market the events. The schools are enthused about continuing partnership in this effort. ◆ Staff from the CSO, Bellingham Technical College, and The Opportunity Council distributed flyers to the community businesses and organizations. ◆ The CSO, Employment Security, The Opportunity Council, and the colleges were responsible for scheduling staff for the different tables and for gathering written material. ◆ The Bellingham CSO, Employment Security Dept, The Opportunity Council, Whatcom County Health Department, Planned Parenthood, St. Joseph Recovery Center (drug and alcohol counselor), Whatcom Crisis Services (domestic violence coordinator), Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, Headstart, and Bellingham Housing Authority helped staff the tables in the different communities. <p>Many new partners were brought into the process as resources at the events or for supplying written material for the tables. Some had previous connections with some of the other partners, but for many, this was the first time they met people who provided other services. This was the first time the Readiness-to-Learn staff at the different schools interacted with many of the social service agencies. As a result, several agencies were invited to a subsequent Readiness-to-Learn countywide meeting.</p> <p>Family Services Outreach was primarily funded by a WorkFirst High Performance Bonus grant. However, this grant did not pay for staff or refreshments. Those were provided by the participating agencies. The Readiness-to-Learn coordinators secured facilities free of charge for each event. They also advertised the events in their newsletters and bulletins. Public Service announcements as well as paid advertisements in the newspapers and on the radio were arranged through The Opportunity Council.</p> <p>Existing partnerships were strong before the event, but Family Services Outreach solidified the professional trust between agencies. Each organization was confident that their partner would accomplish assigned tasks on time with quality and effectiveness. Each organization supports the concept and design of the Family Services Outreach. It is expected to become an annual event with increased participation in the coming years.</p>

Are additional materials available upon request? ☒ Yes newspaper articles, posters, press releases.

**Whatcom WorkFirst Local Planning Area
Innovative Project
High Performance Bonus Application**

The partners of the Whatcom LPA support and collectively nominate the attached project as our submittal for consideration for the 2002 High Performance Bonus Award for Innovative Project.

Bellingham Community Services Office

Date

Employment Security Department

Date

Bellingham Technical College

Date

Whatcom Community College

Date

Service Alternatives, Inc.

Date

The Opportunity Council

Date

NW Workforce Development Council

Date